

SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES THAT FACE NEBRASKANS WHO EXPERIENCE A BRAIN INJURY

Issue

Persons with brain injury are falling through the cracks of Nebraska's existing services and are at risk of a lifetime dependency on public funds because help is not available.

Background

Just over 3,000 Nebraskans each year experience a head injury. Fortunately, not all head injuries result in ongoing limitations. Nebraska's service system under Medicaid and Medicaid Waivers can assist qualified individuals with a brain injury who experience severe enough limitations. However, the menu of service options under these programs does not include services that are specifically needed by persons with brain injuries. The lack of special training and services for brain injury leaves many individuals without the help they need to live independently and places them at risk of institutionalization.

Other individuals with brain injuries who experience mild or moderate limitations have difficulty qualifying for Medicaid Waivers yet still experience difficulty in living independently in their community. Families are faced with spending a lifetime of savings, quitting jobs, or breaking apart as they struggle to provide support to loved ones who have no service options available. These situations can result in poverty, crime, and homelessness leading to a lifelong dependency on public programs and funds.

Recommendations

Nebraska needs to:

- Expand the existing Traumatic Brain Injury Waiver to include community-based services. This would provide much needed services that are not currently available along with specially trained staff to deal with the unique needs of persons with brain injury. This bill would provide funds to match federal Medicaid dollars to expand the TBI Waiver as envisioned under the Money Follows the Person Grant activities proposed by Nebraska.
- Establish an Interim Crisis Fund to begin to assist persons with brain injuries with flexible intervening services and financial assistance at a point that could prevent them from becoming dependent on public funds or at risk of institutionalization. This fund would be similar to the Brain Injury Trust Funds already established by 21 other states.

Anticipated opposition

Some may be opposed to the source of revenue. While we are open to suggestions, motor vehicle registrations are being used by New Jersey and proposed as a source by at least one other state. Motor vehicles are one of the leading causes of head injury in Nebraska. Other states are generating revenues for their funds by imposing fees on violent crimes, firearms or motor vehicle violations such as speeding, reckless driving, and DUIs.